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EDITORIALS.

EDITORS, E. D. COPE AND J. S. KINGSLEY.

—THE Association of Colleges in New England is taking a good step in its discussion of the following proposed changes in the courses of study in the grammar schools:

1. The introduction of elementary natural history into the earlier years of the program as a substantial subject, to be taught by demonstrations and practical exercises rather than from books.

2. The introduction of elementary physics into the later years of the program as a substantial subject, to be taught by the experimental or laboratory method, and to include exact weighing and measuring by the pupils themselves.

3. The introduction of elementary algebra at an age not later than twelve years.

4. The introduction of elementary plane geometry at an age not later than thirteen years.

5. The offering of the opportunity to study French, German, or Latin, or any two of these languages from and after the age of ten years.

As it has been in the past, the whole course of instruction in the much-praised New England common schools has been such as to repress the individuality and to discourage the observational powers of the pupil. The curriculum has apparently been devised to teach a lot of difficult arithmetical puzzles of no practical value and to encumber the young minds with a lot of abstruse grammatical rules which they must learn, parrot-like, but which they cannot understand until they are more mature. So to gain time for these new subjects, surely as valuable to the ordinary person as cube root or the rules of prosody and the definition of "a conditional, subjunctive, dependent sentence," it is proposed to take from the time usually allotted to arithmetic, geography, and grammar.

That the change will be made without considerable opposition is not to be expected, for the present teachers of our grammar schools are not prepared to teach by the observational method. Were it merely demanded that the instructor should hear the students repeat by rote the statements in some trashy "Fourteen Weeks" text book, there would be little trouble. They could handle that as they do the

drunkard-stomach physiology ; but experimental work demands more training and more brains. The new curriculum demands better trained teachers, it provides more practical information for the student ; and when we remember that the majority of our children leave their schools behind at the close of the grammar school grade, the necessity of some such change as that here outlined is self evident.

This subject of increase in the scope of our lower schools is attractive, and when upon it one scarcely knows where to stop. Custom and incompetency have forced so many things upon us and inertia so maintains them as they are that a change is a matter of the greatest difficulty. Yet everyone who has studied carefully even the so-called pattern schools of the larger cities of Massachusetts sees that they occupy an enormous amount of time with ridiculously small results. They regard the infantile mind as so much plastic material which must be pressed into a conventional mold and the time necessary for this shaping is regulated by that of the dullest intellects. The children are drilled in the spelling of words like phthisic, and eleemosynary, which they will never have occasion to use until they arrive at years of maturity, and they are kept at the simple problems of addition and multiplication until they are perfect in them, utterly regardless of the fact that this perfection is to be obtained only through practice, and that this practice is to be had in abundance in all the subsequent arithmetical work. Time enough can be gained right here for the insertion of some observational science without the omission of a single useful principle or fact.

Whether it is actually so, or whether it is one of the fictions of our national pride, we are given to regarding the youth of the United States as intellectually the equals of those of any other nation, but it is a mortifying fact that when we compare our children with those of an equal age trained in the schools of Germany and France ours are the sufferers. These foreigners know more things and they know them more thoroughly. They have, at the close of the grammar school grade, not only a knowledge of the "three R's," but they have a grounding of at least one language, and they know besides, the elementary principles of several sciences. The writer believes that with proper instruction our children can equal them, even with our absurdly difficult orthography, and he welcomes this step on the part of the Association as in the right direction.